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ABSTRACT

This paper reports the survey of a small population of international English-as-a-Second-Language (ESL) student teachers at Deakin University (Melbourne, Victoria) in Australia. Particular emphasis of the study was on what these student teachers have learned from their courses and what challenges they believe they will face on return to their home countries. The program usually has 30-40 international students, mostly from surrounding Asian countries (Hong Kong, Indonesia, Kiribati, Laos, Thailand, and Vietnam); around 50% attend on government scholarship. Most believed they were learning current knowledge about language teaching methodology and ESL/English-as-a-Foreign-Language teaching resources. Most student teachers also felt they were learning much about the Australian Teachers of English as a Second Language program organization as well as related, available technology. Teaching concerns about returning to their home country centered around developing flexibility in teaching approaches, coping with large class sizes, and adapting learned skills to local content. Concerns were also mentioned about obtaining current sources of information, textbooks, and technology and financial resources in the home country. Actual comments from international students are included. Note is also made of the cultural differences these students encounter to pursue this education, and how they might be helped to cope with these albeit temporary changes in their lives. (Contains 12 references.) (NAV)

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TESOL in developing countries: Challenges for teacher education

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1. Introduction

In the last twenty years Australian universities - in common with those in the rest of the English-speaking world - have experienced increasing ethnic diversity in their student intakes as universities have become less elitist. At the same time, Australian universities have come under increasing pressure to be more "efficient" , which is politicians' language for increased student intakes and lower operating grants. As Australian students have been expected to pay an ever increasing contribution to their university course costs, either through up-front fees or through the taxation system when their salary reaches a particular level (the so-called Higher Education Contribution Scheme), they have become more demanding and calls for greater relevance and better teaching have begun to be heard. University administrators, teachers and politicians have become increasingly aware of the need to improve the quality of the teaching and learning which takes place in tertiary institutions (Baldwin, 1991), and to increase the numbers of fee-paying students attracted into universities.

In this context, Australian universities have realised that it is important to attract international fee-paying students, and our universities are now competing with each other, and with universities in the USA and the UK for part of this lucrative market. The cynical observer might see the current emphasis on fee-paying international students as a reflection of the prevailing economic conditions, rather than as being driven simply by concern for the social and economic well-being of our neighbours. However, this would not be completely accurate, as the Australian Government is active through the Australian International Development Assistance Bureau (AIDAB) in providing scholarships of various kinds to enable students from developing countries in our region to come to Australia to study. In recent years there have been increasing numbers of international students in Australian universities, and Asian countries now provide three quarters of all our international students (Department of Education Employment and Training, 1993).

Given the relative proximity of Australia, its political stability, and its well-established universities, the economic development occurring in our region of the world, and the increasing need for English language skills at various levels of society for development and tourism, it is not surprising that Australian TESOL programs are popular among international students. Whether the courses international students receive are relevant to their needs is less clear.

There have been numerous studies of the particular needs of international students in Australia (cf Bochner and Wicks, 1972; Bradley and Bradley, 1984; Gassin, 1982; Samuelowicz 1987; Nixon, 1993, 1994), and it is common for writers to report on the linguistic, cultural and personal difficulties international students may face in learning in a different language and culture. Few studies have considered the curriculum offered to international students in various academic programs and the relevance or otherwise to their home countries, although Hodson (1994) considers the constraints faced by Thai teachers in implementing communicative approaches given the large class sizes which are common, and Nixon (1994) considers the expectations of international students undertaking TESOL programs and the degree to which expectations are met.

As Holly (1990) states in relation to language teaching, many of our values and methodologies are ideological, and there is no reason to think that the situation of language teaching courses for TESOL specialists is any different. Indeed, as Holliday (1994: 12-13) points out, current English language teaching methodologies have been developed in private language schools and university departments in Britain, Australasia and North America (termed the "BANA" model by Holliday), and may not be suitable for tertiary secondary and primary institutions in those countries or elsewhere (Holliday's "TESEP" sector). As a university department in the "BANA" sector offering programs to students from the "TESEP" sector in a range of different countries, we have a clear responsibility to ensure that programs are as relevant as possible. The question we face is, therefore, do we meet the needs of all our students, or are we simply attempting to foist an inappropriate "BANA" model on our international students as well as on our Australian students who teach in primary and secondary schools?

This paper concerns a small survey of international students undertaking TESOL programs at Deakin University, Melbourne, Australia in 1994, with particular emphasis on what they believe they have gained from the courses undertaken, and what challenges the students perceive they will face on their return to their home countries. It is hoped that this small piece of work will shed some light on the implications for TESOL course development and delivery to international students in particular.

2. Courses undertaken

Deakin University offers a range of TESOL programs for Australian and international students, and while other universities provide special courses for international students, we deliberately attempt to ensure a balance between Australian and international students in our classes. While the actual number varies from year to year, in any given year we have between 30 and 40 international students undertaking our programs at Graduate Certificate, Graduate Diploma and Masters levels. For the 1994 survey we had a total of 23 responses from the 35 international students we had on our courses, distributed as follows:

MA (TESOL)	4
Graduate Diploma of TESOL	14
Graduate Certificate of TESOL	5

3. Home countries

The home countries of course participants may vary markedly from year to year, but the home countries of respondents to our 1994 survey were as follows:

Hong Kong	1
Indonesia	3
Kiribati	1
Laos	5
Thailand	13
Vietnam	1

4. Funding source

Of the 23 respondents to our survey, 19 held scholarships granted by the Australian International Development Aid Bureau (AIDAB) or other government sources, and four were privately funded.

5. What has been learned ?: Student perceptions

Table I indicates a summary of responses to this question, expressed in rounded percentages and simplified to the extent that the response categories of "strongly agree" and "agree" , and "strongly disagree" and "disagree" have been combined.

TABLE I

Learning	SA/A	N	D/SD
Current knowledge about language teaching methodology	100%		
Current knowledge about resources for teaching ESL/EFL	95%	4%	
Information about how TESOL programs are taught in Australia	87%	13%	
Information about how TESOL programs are organised in Australia	82%	17%	
Information about technology available to support language teaching in Australia (videos, computers etc.)	78%	22%	

From the table it is clear that all respondents felt that they were learning current knowledge about language teaching methodology, most felt that they were learning about resources for teaching ESL/EFL, about how TESOL programs are taught and organised in Australia, and about technology available to support language teaching.

When invited to make further comments, many respondents took the opportunity to offer a range of statements about what they felt they had gained from the course, which we have grouped under the following categories:

- Theory and practice
- Teaching styles
- Learning styles
- Contact with Australian and international teachers

Theory and practice

A number of respondents comment that they have gained a combination of theoretical background and practical assistance from the course, and the following quotations are typical:

> "Theoretical and practical aspects related to communicative language teaching." (Thai)

> "This course has broadened the horizon of my knowledge on teaching methodology and approaches."(Thai)

> "I think this course is very useful for me. I'll use everything that I've learned from here.... I really feel better than last time, I get more experience now and I hope I'll do my best when I return to Laos. Thank you very much." (Laotian)

Teaching styles

A number of respondents remark that they have gained from exposure to different styles of teaching and the teaching materials provided to them:

> "The Study Guide is very good. It can be a good model for those who want to prepare materials for EFL teaching program in Thailand too." (Thai)

> "A good style of teaching of my lecturers for teaching units." (Thai)

> "Group discussion is very good. It worked well because all of us are adults who can bring previous knowledge and experiences to share with group members." (Thai)

> " Working in groups seems to be the most successful because we are different in at least two things: native and non-native speakers and level of students we teach." (Indonesian)

> " The study guide is very useful. It keeps us on the right track besides giving outlines on teaching units." (Indonesian)

Learning styles:

A number of students remark that they have been changed by the experience of studying with us:

> " I am now a teacher who reads books not one who only follows the textbook." (Laotian)

"The course has really given me an opportunity to practise skills of "learning how to learn". I have learned many useful things that I can bring back home including useful communicative activities in class which are very applicable. It has been a wonderful experience for me." (Thai)

Contact with Australian and international TESOL teachers

A number of respondents commented that they had gained from the contact with TESOL professionals from Australia and overseas in their classes:

"Sociocultural knowledge through communicating with the local classmates." (Thai)

"I have gained more knowledge from exchanging ideas with classmates, both Australians and Laos people. I know more about how they teach and what they focus on in language teaching for ESL and LOTE students." (Thai)

However, for one student such contact should be more structured as class time is insufficient for close contact to develop:

"More get togethers between local and international students should be encouraged" (Thai)

For another, the work load of the course cuts across the perceived importance of developing cross-cultural contacts:

"We do not have a lot of contact with local students or the community as we are too busy working on the course requirements to socialise on the weekends." (Thai)

Another Thai student makes a similar comment about the demands of the course:

"There are too many activities for each week and we find it hard to cope with every one of them." (Thai)

6. What challenges will be faced on return to the home country?

Table II indicates a summary of responses to this question, expressed in rounded percentages and simplified to the extent that the response categories of "strongly agree" and "agree" , and "strongly disagree" and "disagree" have been combined.

TABLE II

Challenge	SA/A	N	D/SD
Developing flexibility in teaching approaches	100%	-	-
Large class sizes	96%	4%	
Adapting new learning to the local content	96%	4%	
Adapting the set text to the needs of my classes	87%	13%	
Obtaining current sources of information on language teaching methodology (journals, books etc.)	87%	13%	
Lack of rapid and efficient international communication (e-mail, fax etc.)	74%	7%	17%
Making contact with diverse groups of native English speakers to maintain my language competence	65%	35%	
Accessing support systems for English language teachers	65%	35%	
Obtaining English language materials	57%	43%	
Developing a professional community of English language teachers and researchers	57%	35%	9%
Limited technological resources (computer, videos, tape-recorders etc.)	57%	13%	30%
Limited material resources (books, tapes, slides etc.)	48%	30%	22%

From the table it is clear that all or most foresee that they will face difficulties in developing flexibility in teaching approaches, and in adapting the set text and what they have learned to the local context. Given that in many countries in our region there is a much greater degree of centralised control over the curriculum than is common in Australia, and an external examination which drives the curriculum, especially at secondary level, these responses are not surprising. However, what is sometimes forgotten is that the freedoms which Australian teachers currently enjoy are relatively new, and in the state of Victoria at least, the pendulum seems to be swinging back towards much greater control over curriculum by central authority in the names of "efficiency" and "accountability."

As expected, large class sizes dominate the thinking of the international students, and as many report that they face classes of sixty students or more, this is again not surprising. However, we tend to forget that large class sizes were the norm especially in primary schools in Australia not so long ago, and the move to smaller class sizes is a relatively recent phenomenon which could easily be reversed by a government with an eye to the "bottom line". The challenge for us is to persuade sceptical students that , given modification if necessary, many of the classroom practices we advocate can be made to work in large classes.

Other responses indicate the relative isolation in which some of our TESOL colleagues are forced to work in around the world. For example 87% report that it is difficult to obtain current sources of information on language teaching in journals, books etc, and 65% report that they face challenges in accessing support systems for English language teachers on their return. However it would be wrong to make stereotypical judgements about the questions, as much depends on the country in which people work, the sector (primary, secondary or tertiary) and the setting (urban or rural).

For example, one of our Laotian teachers reported that she was the sole teacher of English in her tertiary institution, she had classes of sixty, and she was the only person in the class who had a copy of the English text-book. Teachers from country areas of Laos may not have electricity in their schools, so the availability of much equipment we assume cannot be taken for granted , and computers, e-mail and the Internet are so far in the future that they seem impossible dreams. On the other hand, university teachers of English in Thailand are quite likely to work in large active departments with good libraries, and to have access to computers, e-mail and the Internet. This accounts for some of the disparities in some of the figures on the "lack of rapid and efficient international communication, " limited technological resources" and "limited material resources", and it may be that Holliday's distinction between the "BANA" and "TESEP" sectors may break down as use of e-mail and the Internet spreads through the developing world.

Given that we have the facilities in Australia, should we deny the Laotian teachers a view of the possibilities, or should we show them how to access resources such as TESL-L while they can, and encourage them to hope that such facilities will be available to them one day in the future?

Further comments

When invited to make further comments, many respondents took the opportunity to offer a range of statements about the challenges they felt they faced on their return, which we have grouped under the following categories:

Adapting approaches/materials
Confidence about English/Opportunities to practise
Students' attitudes to and competence in English
Attitudes of colleagues
Public pressures
Lack of support
Individual demands/pressures

Adapting approaches/materials

A number of respondents commented that they need to be selective in the application of some of the ideas presented because of cultural differences, resource availability, the constraints imposed by national curricula:

> "Not every teaching methodology we have learned here is suitable to the context in Indonesia. Consideration should be given to aspects of local cultures and initial differences between English-speaking and Indonesian-speaking communities." (Indonesian)

> "..... some approaches .... are not appropriate to my setting since they are designed to Australia and other developed countries where materials and resources for teaching can be produced quickly." (Kiribati)

> "Since Indonesia uses a national curriculum we need to think how it might be adapted." (Indonesian)

> ".... bilingual approaches are not appropriate at secondary level as it is not allowed to use the native language..." (Kiribati)

Confidence about English/Opportunities to practise

For other students a lack of confidence in their English ability persists, despite the fact that they have coped very well with a very demanding course. Some are concerned that the hard-won gains in their oral competence may be lost on their return as opportunities to practise English with native speakers are limited or non-existent:

> "Lack of native speakers to practise with." (Thai)

> "Although I have a chance to talk to foreigners but most of them are from Asian country, Africa, Oceania, so English is their foreign or second language. However, at least I have a chance to use English, not only use it in class for my teaching." (Thai)

For one student, the intensive preparatory course was felt to be insufficient, and an on-going class was felt necessary:

"What I want to learn is "speaking." (I think practice speaking by chatting among classmates is not enough - I need a "speaking course.") (Thai)

Students' attitudes to and competence in English

For others, the major challenge they face is the attitudes of their students to the learning of English:

"An important challenge ... I will face when I return to my country is students' quite wrong attitudes towards English learning. Most of my students tend to have negative (attitudes) to the study of English so I have to find a practical way to change their ideas first so that they can study English more effectively. (Most Thai students just have an idea that English is a subject they must study in order to pass the Entrance Examination and get better jobs.)" (Thai)

For others a major challenge they face is the low level of their students' English:

"When I return I will face the problem of using English in a class where children do not speak English as a second language or native language. Children have very limited spoken English and some cannot write or read English at all. " (Kiribati)

" .. the problem is how to teach ESL students in limited language resource." (Indonesian)

"A lot of students are poor in English and rarely have an opportunity to use English outside class." (Thai)

Attitudes of colleagues:

A number of our students foresaw that their colleagues would present a challenge to them on their return and might prevent them from implementing new ideas:

"Working with people who have strong belief on the superiority of the traditional approaches to language teaching over the new (more communicative) ones." (Indonesian)

"Old-fashioned and narrow-minded teachers of English . " (Thai)

"Facing different attitudes towards classroom use (should we keep the walls clean, can we stick pictures to the walls ? etc) (Indonesian)

"Arguments on EFL methodology among scholars." (Thai)

"Lack of English teachers with overseas teaching experience." (Thai)

As a number of countries in our region will not permit teachers over forty to travel overseas for further study, it may be that the students we receive are relatively junior and hence relatively powerless when matters such as curriculum development and change are at issue.

Public pressures

A number of teachers refer to the limitations imposed upon them either by the external examination system which may well not take account of changes in language teaching (cf the Indonesian "Ebtanas"), or the competing demands of the public, and parents on the curriculum. The following comment by a Hong Kong high school teacher is typical:

> "Public demands on school curricula, learners' parents' expectations, time allocation will have an effect on language teaching." (Hong Kong)

Lack of support

For other teachers the challenge they will face is the general lack of support and recognition:

> "We need more support from our boss and government, both financial support (budget) for teaching materials and educational support such as having more teaching seminars." (Thai)

In some countries in our region teachers' salaries are low and teachers can survive only by working two or three jobs. In some rural areas the opportunities for external employment are very limited and some Laotian teachers have informed us that it is necessary to keep chickens, ducks or buffalo in order to feed the family. Clearly the matter of appropriate remuneration for English teachers is a matter of government policy, and it is difficult to see how courses such as ours can have an influence on this. Indeed, in some cases it appears that study overseas with the consequent improvement in English and the possession of an overseas qualification can lead to a more lucrative career in tourism rather than in teaching.

Individual demands/pressures:

As is the case with any group, a wide range of individual concerns are mentioned as being challenges to be faced on return. These can range from individually-defined challenges as in the following:

> "Setting up a self-access centre might be the only challenge for me." (Thai)

> "I would like to set up a language centre for adult learners. I am not sure whether I can do it because there are a lot of things needed - money and knowledge and management." (Thai)

Others relate more to their on-going professional development as teachers, as in the following examples:

> "What to do to make tertiary teaching more effective." (Thai)

> "Access to research in teaching English, especially in distance learning systems." (Thai)

Others are sent by their home institutions with quite a specific brief as in the following example:

> "To stimulate the literary appreciation in students." (Thai)

However, this last example shows that needs as defined by individual institutions can change. The teacher who wrote this comment was sent by his institution on the understanding that on his return he would be expected to establish a program in Australian literature . When we learned this, we made arrangements for the teacher to speak to the appropriate lecturers in our faculty and to participate in lectures and seminars on Australian literature. However, a few weeks after arriving in Melbourne, the teacher received a letter from his institution informing him that his teaching assignment ion his return had been changed, and there was no further interest in Australian literature. While we would not suggest that Australian universities are immune from this sort of change, we do suggest that the needs of international students undertaking programs overseas may be defined by people other than themselves, and that the perceived needs may change quite suddenly. Clearly courses offered to international students need to be flexible enough to cope with changes in definition of student need, whether defined by the student or by the student's home institution.

7. Adjustments made to our courses

Given the challenges the students face on their return home, what adjustments have we made to the courses we currently offer? Evaluation of our programs is regular and on-going, and is now formally required by the "quality assurance" processes demanded by the Government, and we have made changes in response to feed-back from our Australian and international students. These changes have affected the materials we use, our classroom practices, our expectations of the students, and our own professional development.

Teaching materials

Reference has already been made to our Study Guides which we originally developed for our off-campus students. We realised that these guides would provide an additional degree of support to our international students, and these guides are now available to all our students whether they are studying on-campus or off-campus. We ensure that there is a focus on EFL and ESL issues, that the main issues of the topics are highlighted before students undertake their further reading, and that there are "signposts" which encourage the students to listen in the lectures rather than engage in speed writing. One great advantage of the guides is that they provide a resource which the students can return to as needed.

Classroom practices

In considering our own classroom practices we decided to extend the opportunities for group work, to encourage international students to share ideas and knowledge with their Australian colleagues, to provide a 'natural', relaxed opportunity for international students to engage in discussion with local students about topics of professional interest, to encourage the sharing of practical classroom strategies and ways of overcoming large class sizes, inadequate materials etc, and to encourage cross-cultural friendships. This seems to be working well.

Expectations of students

Following concerns expressed by international students, we monitor more carefully the work-load and expectations we have of all our students. While we cannot stop people from working until three am in the morning if they wish, we do encourage students to take some time off to enjoy themselves and we organise social occasions at which Australian and international students can mix and talk about anything but TESOL.

Our professional development

Through our reading and our discussions with international students we have tried to increase our awareness of the diversity of the different countries from which our students come. One factor which appears very relevant is the country's previous experience with the English language and culture. For example, is the country a former British colony such as Kiribati, or a former colony of another country (such as Indonesia), or does the country have no recent history of colonisation? What is the current role of English within the country? What experience have English teachers had of communicative approaches to language teaching? Are there major differences between urban and rural areas of the country concerning English language teaching? Is the country undergoing major development and what effects is this having on attitudes to learning English, the resourcing of English language programs, the salary levels of teachers, and so on?

At the same time we have tried to inform ourselves of the social, cultural, regional, linguistic and economic differences which may exist between students from the same country of origin. These may be very marked in some cases, and less marked in others, and this may be a very sensitive subject to raise with students, but it is important that we be aware of such issues which may affect English language teaching and learning in the country.

8. Conclusion

Cultural and emotional aspects of study overseas

The cultural and emotional aspects of study overseas are often considered in pre-departure programs, and students often arrive aware of differences in the Australian accent vocabulary and idiom, and the possibility that they will experience culture shock and miss family and friends. However, it is one thing to be intellectually aware of culture shock, and quite another to cope with it if it strikes. Even when telephone contact is easy, a telephone call is no substitute for contact with a child or spouse, and periods of illness of children thousands of miles away are stressful for both parent and child. There is little which we can do to assist with difficulties such as these, apart from referring the affected student to the appropriate counsellor.

Changes during the year overseas

A year or two spent studying overseas may bring about major changes in people, quite apart from the expected development in their knowledge and skills, and the individuals involved may only become consciously aware of these changes on their return home. These changes may affect relationships with family and friends and colleagues, who may not understand what has happened and may tend to blame the pernicious

influence of "the west" for the changes. We also forget that social and political changes can occur in home countries and these can have quite a dramatic effect on the daily lives of citizens which cannot be fully discovered through newspaper reports or letters from home.

Expected role on return

In some cases students may face impossible expectations of colleagues or superiors who expect the returnee to be a lone "miracle worker" in a difficult teaching situation. Perhaps students themselves return with unreal expectations about what changes can be effected by one teacher working alone. Other students may be pleased to be challenged by a demanding new role on their return from overseas, and quite realistic about what can be achieved. Perhaps students are unprepared for feelings of jealousy or resentment from superiors or colleagues who have not been lucky enough to be sent overseas for study. Others may find that they now have more in common with colleagues who have studied overseas in Britain, the United States or Australia. Perhaps students may feel frustrated by the lack of funds or facilities to put into place curriculum changes seen overseas. Others may see that lacking funds can be obtained by recommending changes in priorities or by establishing links with overseas institutions. The point we are making here is that one person's insurmountable situation may be another person's challenge, and it is impossible for courses of study to change personalities or predict every possible situation teachers may face on their return home.

Variation within "international students"

Throughout this paper we have been using the term "international student" as a useful umbrella term. However, such terminology conceals the real differences between individuals from what may be loosely described in the West as the "same" culture. We have already alluded to the fact that culture shock affects some individuals quite badly and others hardly at all. Some individuals may react quite negatively to spending a year in a large city like Melbourne, particularly if they come from a rural area of Thailand for example. Others may complain that Melbourne is too quiet and peaceful, and seems "dead" after the hustle and the crowds of Bangkok. We need to keep reminding ourselves that "international student" is a crude label which conceals individual, cultural , socio-economic, linguistic and regional differences, among many others. We need to give close attention to individual students whether from Melbourne or overseas, and provide them with the skills, knowledge and strategies to define their new role(s) in their institutions on the completion of their course of study.

Pre-return briefing

As stated above, international students often receive intensive pre-departure briefing programs, and they may also undertake special bridging programs on arrival in Australia. Such programs are essential and appear to be quite effective. However, more attention needs to be given to de-briefing students prior to their return to their home country. Students can usefully meet in groups to discuss the experience they have had in Australia, how they may have changed as a result, and how colleagues and family may react to these invisible changes. Students may discuss what they may be able to achieve professionally on their return and be encouraged to consider the possible constraints and possible strategies to overcome them. Rather than expect to have answers provided for all the possible challenges they may face on their return, international

students need to feel confident that whatever the challenges they face, they have strategies to deal with them.

Holliday's suggestion (1994) that each teacher needs to become an ethnographer of the culture of their individual classrooms represents an interesting way of approaching this issue. However, international students do not come to our courses to become anthropologists or ethnographers, but to improve their English language and teaching skills. Ultimately, diversity is the norm in every classroom, and having discovered this, the teacher is still left with the problem of deciding what to teach and how to teach it. It is our responsibility as TESOL teacher educators to assist individual students to devise strategies to cope with the many demands on them when they return home to their families and their jobs.

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